

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 INR-07 L-03 ACDA-05

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4246

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY PARIS

CINCLANT

USCINCEUR

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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 13408

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: MPOL, NATO, NL

SUBJECT: PROPOSED REDUCTIONS IN NETHERLANDS ARMED
FORCES

REF: (A) STATE 198550; (B) LONDON 13133;
(C) BRUSSELS 7482; (D) COPENHAGEN 2419

SUMMARY: UK HAS DECIDED AGAINST MAKING BILATERAL AP-
PROACH TO GON AT THIS TIME ON PROPOSED NETHERLANDS DE-
FENSE REDUCTIONS. OFFICIAL EXPLANATION IS THAT DEFENSE
MINISTER MASON ANTICIPATED US REQUEST WHEN G. H. PEYNEN-
BURG, STATE SECRETARY OF THE DUTCH DEFENSE MINISTRY, GAVE
HIM PREVIEW OF PROPOSED CUTS DURING JULY MEETING IN LON-
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DON. FCO AND MOD WILL, HOWEVER, RECOMMEND THAT THEIR

MINISTERS APPROVE TOUGH INSTRUCTIONS FOR UK NATO DELEGATION TO USE IN DPC DISCUSSIONS. BLEAK BRITISH ASSESSMENT CONCLUDES DUTCH DECISION IS ESSENTIALLY FAIT ACCOMPLI, AND ALLIANCE CAN ONLY REALISTICALLY HOPE NOW TO ARREST FURTHER ROT IN NETHERLANDS' CONTRIBUTION TO COMMON DEFENSE. EMBASSY RECOMMENDS THAT SECRETARY DISCUSS MATTER WITH CALLAGHAN IF HE SEES FOREIGN SECRETARY IN NEW YORK AND SECRETARY SCHLESINGER RAISE WITH UK OFFICIALS DURING HIS PROPOSED LATE SEPTEMBER VISIT. END SUMMARY.

. 1. WE WERE CALLED IN AUGUST 28 BY ALISTAIR HUNTER, ACTING HEAD WESTERN ORGANIZATIONS DEPARTMENT (FCO) TO RECEIVE OFFICIAL UK RESPONSE TO US SUGGESTION (REFTEL A) THAT BRITISH REGISTER THEIR CONCERN BILATERALLY WITH THE GON OVER PROPOSED REDUCTIONS IN THE NETHERLANDS ARMED FORCES. DESPITE ITS WISH TO CONSIDER OUR REQUEST SYMPATHETICALLY, THE UK HAS DECIDED AGAINST APPROACHING THE DUTCH AT THIS TIME.

2. ACCORDING TO HUNTER, BRITISH BASED THEIR NEGATIVE DECISION LARGELY ON SUPPOSITION THAT THEY MET THE SPIRIT OF OUR REQUEST DURING A JULY MEETING IN LONDON BETWEEN DEFENSE SECRETARY ROY MASON AND G. H. PEYNENBURG, STATE SECRETARY OF THE DUTCH DEFENSE MINISTRY. AT THAT TIME, PEYNENBURG GAVE MASON A COMPREHENSIVE PREVIEW OF THE PROPOSED REDUCTIONS AND, ACCORDING TO HUNTER, MASON APPLIED TO HIS VISITOR "A FAIR BIT OF THE OLD STICK." MASON WARNED THAT THE DUTCH COULD EXPECT SUBSTANTIAL DIFFICULTIES IN NATO OVER THEIR PROPOSED CUTS, ESPECIALLY FROM THE US AND FRG. THERE WAS A REAL RISK THAT SUCH UNILATERAL ACTS COULD UNRAVEL THE ALLIANCE. IN THAT EVENT, MASON STONILY OBSERVED, IT WOULD BE MORE EXPENSIVE FOR THE NETHERLANDS TO SEE SINGLY TO ITS OWN DEFENSE THAN TO MAINTAIN NOW ITS RELATIVELY MODEST CONTRIBUTION TO NATO. MOREOVER, DUTCH ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES WERE NOT NEARLY SO SEVERE AS THOSE PLAGUING THE UK, AND CERTAINLY WERE NO EXCUSE FOR SUCH SERIOUS SLICING OF DEFENSE EXPENDITURES. FINALLY, ANY GON DEFENSE REDUCTION WOULD INCREASE POLITICAL PRESSURE IN THE UK TO FURTHER CHOP THE BRITISH DEFENSE BUDGET AND THUS MAKE MASON'S OWN BUDGETARY BATTLES

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THAT MUCH MORE DIFFICULT. (THIS IS FIRST WE HAVE HEARD OF MASON-PEYNENBURG MEETING IN LONDON AND FACT THAT UK RECEIVED ADVANCE NOTIFICATION OF PROPOSED DUTCH CUTS. WE WONDER IF DEPARTMENT OR EMBASSY THE HAGUE HAD ANY WORD THAT THESE TALKS TOOK PLACE.)

3. IN VIEW OF MASON'S THUMPING OF PEYNENBURG, BRITISH DECIDED THAT THEY HAD ANTICIPATED US CONCERN AND THAT IT

WOULD BE BAD TACTICS TO BILATERALLY "COME ON HEAVY AGAIN WITH THE DUTCH." THIS DID NOT, HOWEVER, HUNTER EMPHASIZED PRESAGE A PASSIVE BRITISH ROLE AT NATO DURING THE SEPTEMBER DPC DISCUSSION OF THIS ISSUE. WHEN THEIR MINISTERS RETURN FROM AUGUST HOLIDAYS, FCO AND MOD WILL RECOMMEND TOUGH INSTRUCTIONS FOR UK NATO DELEGATION AND HUNTER WAS CONFIDENT THAT CALLAGHAN AND MASON, WITH THEIR ROBUST ATTITUDES TOWARD DEFENSE MATTERS, WOULD APPROVE.

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4. IN ENSUING DISCUSSION, WE ASKED FOR UK JUDGMENT OF EXTENT DUTCH DEFENSE MINISTER VREDELING WOULD BE DISPOSED, OR ABLE, TO RESIST CUTS IN HIS BUDGET. BLEAK BRITISH

ASSESSMENT IS THAT CURRENT PRESSURES ON GON DEFENSE BUDGET ARE PRINCIPALLY ECONOMIC, AND NOT POLITICAL AS IN 1974, AND THAT DUTCH HAD THEREFORE NOT INITIATED NATO DISCUSSION AS TACTICAL DEVICE WHICH WOULD ALLOW FOR SUBSEQUENT SIGNIFICANT FALLBACK. DEFENSE MINISTRY HAD NOT BEEN SINGLED OUT FOR BUDGETARY REDUCTIONS, AND BRITISH BELIEVE IT WOULD SIMPLY NOT BE PRACTICAL FOR THE GON -- EVEN IF IT WISHED -- TO EXEMPT DEFENSE FROM THE PROJECTED CUTS. ALTHOUGH VREDELING WOULD DO HIS BEST TO MINIMIZE HIS LOSSES, HE WOULD EVENTUALLY HAVE TO ACCEPT MOST
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OF THE REDUCTIONS PROJECTED IN AUGUST 14 DUTCH LETTER TO NATO. REGRETTABLY, HUNTER CONCLUDED, IT APPEARS THE ALLIANCE CAN ONLY REALISTICALLY HOPE, THROUGH STRONG RESPONSE NOW, TO ARREST FURTHER (POST-1975) ROT IN NETHERLANDS' CONTRIBUTION TO COMMON DEFENSE.

5. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH CALLAGHAN AND MASON ARE ALREADY LARGELY CONVERTED TO OUR POINT OF VIEW, WE BELIEVE SECRETARY COULD USEFULLY REINFORCE OUR CONCERN ON THIS MATTER IF HE SEES THE FOREIGN SECRETARY IN NEW YORK. WE ALSO RECOMMEND THAT SECRETARY SCHLESINGER RAISE ISSUE WITH MASON, CALLAGHAN AND ESPECIALLY THE PRIME MINISTER, DURING HIS PROPOSED LATE SEPTEMBER VISIT TO THE UK. WE CANNOT JUDGE WHETHER BRITISH ARE CORRECT THAT THE DUTCH DECISION IS ALL BUT IRREVERSIBLE. BUT WE THINK IT IS IMPORTANT IN THE EARLY MONTHS AFTER THE HELSINKI SUMMIT, AND PARTICULARLY IN LIGHT OF THE PROPOSED DUTCH CUTS, TO BUILD AGAIN AT MINISTERIAL LEVEL A CLEAR AND FIRM RECORD WITH THE WILSON GOVERNMENT THAT, AS WE HAVE ALWAYS SAID, NORMALIZED AND PRODUCTIVE RELATIONS WITH THE EAST DEPEND ON NO EROSION IN THE WEST'S COMMON DEFENSE. THE PRESSURES EVIDENT IN THE NETHERLANDS ARE ALSO PRESENT HERE AND THE LABOR PARTY AND GOVERNMENT--DESPITE MASON'S AND CALLAGHAN'S PERSONAL CONVICTIONS--ARE POTENTIALLY SUSCEPTIBLE TO THESE PRESSURES, BOTH BECAUSE OF THE PARTY'S TRADITIONAL IDEOLOGICAL PERSUASIONS AND BECAUSE OF THE UK'S CURRENT ECONOMIC TRAUMAS. IT IS NOT ONLY THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT (REFTEL C) AND THE DANISH GOVERNMENT (REFTEL D) WHICH RISK SUFFERING IMPACT OF THE DUTCH REDUCTIONS ON THEIR ABILITY TO MAINTAIN CURRENT DEFENSE EXPENDITURES. IF THE INFECTION SPREADS THROUGH THE ALLIANCE, THIS COUNTRY WILL NOT BE IMMUNE. END COMMENT.

RICHARDSON

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